

A History of Salamonie River State Forest

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

This thesis covers one chapter in a collaborative work by several Ball State Honors College students. The entire work will be a comprehensive history of Indiana's state forests and several state recreation areas. This specific chapter covers the history of Salamonie River State Forest and two of the associated state recreation areas, Dora-New Holland and Lost Bridge. The history includes the formation and establishment of the forest and construction of facilities like Hominy Ridge by CCC laborers. Additionally, it describes the transformation of the land into a site for both timber usage as well as recreational usage. The construction of Salamonie Reservoir by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as well as its success in flood control and resulting controversy from inundation and relocation of towns. The chapter concludes with the importance of Salamonie River State Forest to both the state forest system as well as citizens of Indiana.

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Salamonie River State Forest

From Soil to Success: A Demonstration

Civilians for Change

In northeastern Indiana in the early 1930s, there was a piece of land that was about to undergo major changes. This land is located about four miles southeast of Lagro within Wabash County. At the time, the soil here had been deemed submarginal by local agriculturists. Prior to the turn of the 20th century, the area was fertile and thrived, however, poor farming practices and flooding had caused it to take a turn for the worse. The land had lost much of its plant cover causing the soil to be loosened at its surface. As a result, erosion through wind and water runoff had taken over the area resulting in the removal of topsoil. Some areas had even been worn down enough to expose parent material and bedrock consisting of limestone, sandstone, dolomite, siltstone, and shale. It was the sight of this barren land that sparked local citizens and farmers of Wabash County to restore some of the fertility that was lost¹. The result is the 805-acre forest that stands today: the Salamonie River State Forest.

During the Great Depression, a group of Wabash County residents gathered together and pooled their funds to assist in the purchase of a small amount of land amounting to about 40 acres near the Salamonie River.² The land, characteristic of this part of Indiana topography, rolled with hills and rocky bluffs. The local government had high hopes for the area, dedicating it a “demonstration forest.”³ This program was put in place to establish restored forests in Indiana. These forests would then provide public land with abundant resources accessible to fisherman and hunters. They had full intentions of turning the infertile soil into an entire forest filled with

¹ James F. Reed, “Salamonie River State Forest,” *Outdoor Indiana*, June, 1948.

² “State Forests,” *Outdoor Indiana*, January, 1941.

³ “Wabash County State Forest to be ‘Riverside Forest’ Demonstration,” *Outdoor Indiana*, August, 1937.

trees, wildlife, and streams filled with fish. Like other state forests, timber usage was the principal use. For Salamonie, harvested wood was used mostly for veneer and saw logs, posts, piling, poles, and pulpwood.⁴ Additionally, the forest would have other, minimal provisions for the public such as roads, service buildings, and recreational facilities. Thus, the forest would be a demonstration of how infertile land can be restored and have use once again. The Indiana Department of Conservation listened to the needs of the people and enlisted the Civilian Conservation Corps to assist in the establishment of what would be another addition to Indiana's growing list of state forests.

Natural Recreation: Building the Balance

Planning and designing the complete overhaul of the submarginal area had begun in the early 1930s. A CCC camp of 200 men, which was the average number of workers, was established on the Salamonie land and immediately put to work. The master plan that was developed consisted of several different elements that had to be constructed by this group of workers. Planting trees was, not surprisingly, one of the most important steps in creating the new forest. This required planting thousands of seedlings of a variety of tree species across the landscape. Over 20 different species of pines and hardwoods were planted including red pine, white pine, Scotch pine, red maple, white oak, and black walnut.⁵ A walnut progeny study was also included here due to the outstanding quality of the walnut trees.⁶ After the first planting was completed, 25,000 trees had been planted in the forest.⁷ Though the growth of the forest of course did not occur overnight, the land was almost unrecognizable once it had matured after 10-15 years. The Salamonie River had become lined with an expansive forest (Fig. 1).

⁴ Indiana Department of Conservation, 41st Annual Report, 1958-1959.

⁵ "State Conservation Committee Visits Game Preserves, Hatchery and Forest," *Outdoor Indiana*, October, 1936.

⁶ Indiana Department of Conservation, 46th Annual Report, 1963-1964.

⁷ "Lake Fills in Forest, Game Preserve Constructed by CCC Near Wabash," *The Indianapolis Star*, July, 17, 1938.

In addition to planting the forest itself, the CCC constructed the infrastructure of the forest. The men built roads, but because they wanted the forest to remain natural at its core, they were not extensive. They constructed an 18-foot wide crushed stone county road that connected Salamonie to the city of Lagro as well as a branching stone road leading to a picnic area on the south side of the property. In total, only 2.75 miles of roads were laid down.⁸ Soon after, various facilities highlighting the forest's founding principles of timber management were also erected. These facilities and resources included a stone quarry, water wells, a sewage disposal system, one and a half miles of electric line, a 100-car parking lot, 11 stone ovens, 13 stone and oak picnic tables, drinking fountains, and a couple of stone fireplaces.⁹ The CCC team also constructed a separate maintenance area off of the road leading to the picnic portion of the forest. This consisted of a service building which was used to house various equipment, a barn, and a house for the custodian who lived there with his family year-round. By pairing natural forest cover with manmade, recreational structures, the 200 men of the CCC had transformed the infertile soil into habitat for nature, wildlife and citizens.

Constructing Hominy Ridge

Of all the structures built by the CCC, however, it was the Hominy Ridge pairing of a lake and a shelter house that has remained the most notable. While these types of facilities were commonly constructed by the CCC in other state forests, Hominy Ridge has still remained an important part of Salamonie's history. In the southeastern portion of the forest, the men worked to create a small, but remarkable artificial lake. This project took about two years to complete as the workers had to dam a small gully in the area. According to the leader of the project, Lieut. J. C. Tobias, there are no creeks that lead to Hominy Lake. As a result, all the water has to come

⁸ "State Forests," *Outdoor Indiana*, January, 1941.

⁹ "Salamonie River State Forest," *Outdoor Indiana*, October, 1959.

from rain or melting snow.¹⁰ The lake was then stocked with a variety of game fish such as white crappie and walleye making it ready for any experienced or amateur fisherman. Hominy Ridge Lake filled only 11 acres of the land, but it became one of the most recognizable areas of the forest. The shores, lined with the 30-foot tall tree canopies, and the lake became renowned for its exceptional fishing. The lake also remained in close proximity to one of the forest's two waterfalls.

The other half of the famous Hominy Ridge pair is the Hominy Ridge shelter house which sits next to the lake. The CCC workers built the expansive shelter house for recreational use. The foundation of the building was stone, with fieldstone walls supported by timber (Fig. 2). When completed, the structure was 67 feet long and 23.5 feet wide rectangular building with two 5-sided porches; one on the north end and one on the south end, creating an elongated, octagonal shape. These porches are constructed entirely out of timber with the walls only coming up to window height. The rest of the porches were left open to the air. On top of the shelter house sits a wooden shingled roof with two stone chimneys. The overhang of the roof eventually had had to be altered as a nearby walnut tree began growing too close to it. Inside the shelter house is an expansive, open room with stone flooring and visible rafters. There are two stone fireplaces found inside the building, each one about nine feet in width. They also are attached to arched openings leading to several grills in both of the porches. Outside of the shelter house, a picnic area with 13 stone tables (Fig. 3) and a playground were constructed. This all sits among the expansive forest with many walnut and other deciduous trees. As a result, the Hominy Ridge area embodied the entire concept of the Salamonie demonstration forest. This structure, which

¹⁰ "Lake Fills in Forest, Game Preserve Constructed by CCC Near Wabash," *The Indianapolis Star*, July, 17, 1938.

was completed in 1937, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on September 23, 1994.¹¹

Recreating the Past

While Salamonie State Forest is usually a quiet, peaceful recreation area year round currently, it has not gone without incident. The Hominy Ridge Shelter House is a beloved structure characteristic of the forest as it offers a popular picnic spot for families. It has even been used for family reunions and wedding ceremonies. Additionally, it is a piece of history being one of the original structures built by the CCC when the forest was initially created. However, while the structure looks exactly like it did when it was built over 75 years ago, it is actually a reconstruction.

In December of 2002, vandalism occurred in the Hominy Ridge Area and as part of that, the Hominy Ridge Shelter House was burned leaving only the stone foundation. It is unclear how many people were involved in the vandalism and if the resultant fire was due to carelessness or arson. Regardless of how it happened, the historic structure was lost to arson. Starting the following year, donations were accepted by the DNR to help restore the building to its previous state. This was no small project, however. "This requires the use of the same type of lumber and the same techniques employed by the CCC to construct the original shelter."¹² The timber in Salamonie Forest could not even be used as the shelter was originally built using timber from Jackson State Forest in southern Indiana. Because of how the shelter had to be reconstructed, the total cost was between \$25,000 and \$30,000.²⁴ The Dora Christian Church, led by Pastor Bill Cook, and the Lagro Volunteer Fire Department, led by Don Fleck, initiated several of the

¹¹ "Hominy Ridge Shelterhouse," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1994.

¹² Plain Dealer Staff, "Shelter Gets New Life," *Chronicle-Tribune*, October 22, 2003, accessed March 11, 2015, http://www.chronicle-tribune.com/shelter-gets-new-life/article_523ffc2c-4539-5b11-86f9-ee910eb3e0cc.html?mode=jqm

fundraisers that helped raise money for the project. Finally, on Tuesday, October 21, 2003, the Hominy Ridge Shelter House Reconstruction began, led by workers from the Mennonite Disaster Relief Service (Fig. 8). In addition from these workers, several volunteers were involved such as area brick masons. Five of the workers from the Relief Service were even kin of the original CCC camp residents, including Amos Schwartz.¹³ Schwartz, who was a well-known expert on log construction and log building restoration and thus was an invaluable resource for this project. Thanks to all of these volunteers, the new Hominy Ridge Shelter House was completed in 2004.

The Root of the Name

With the initial construction finished, the forest officially became Salamonie River State Forest in 1935. The name was derived from a Miami Native American word “O-sah-mo-nee” meaning “yellow paint”¹⁴ Naturally growing throughout the forest, particularly along the Salamonie River, is a plant called bloodroot. The Miami Native Americans who inhabited the region in the past often used the sap from this plant to mix with animal fats and create yellow and red dyes which would be used as body paint or clothing dyes. The plant was also used as blood purifier when mixed into tea.¹⁵ This name, however, was apparently difficult for people of the time to pronounce. “Practically no one pronounces that name correctly the first time it is tried, and some folk have laughed at each other over the struggles with the word.”¹⁶ Thus, for the record, the correct pronunciation is “Sal-a-moh-nee” with the accent on the “sal.” While it was once thought the forest itself would cover 8-12 thousand acres, it remains at about 805 acres.¹⁷

¹³ “Building on the Past,” *Chronicle-Tribune*, October 27, 2003, accessed March 11, 2015, http://www.chronicle-tribune.com/building-on-the-past/article_5895fe71-9ee7-535e-b092-05c8c30b023e.html?mode=jqm

¹⁴ “Salamonie River State Forest,” Indiana Department of Natural Resources, accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/4814.htm>

¹⁵ Charles C. Willoughby, “The Virginia Indians in the Seventeenth Century,” *American Anthropologist* 9, no. 1 (1907): 57-86.

¹⁶ “Indian Names of State Properties Real Tongue-Twisters for Many,” *Outdoor Indiana*, April, 1939.

¹⁷ “State Forests,” *Outdoor Indiana*, January, 1941.

Each of these acres cost \$36.64 which equals a total of \$29,505.¹⁸ However, four state recreation areas are now administered with the forest, bringing the total area to about 12,500 acres. The Salamonie River State Forest had, over time, undergone an almost unrecognizable transformation and was open to the public. To those who had witnessed the astonishing before and after, one quote rang true, “The forest itself is a living monument to man’s desire to help nature recreate what man, himself destroyed through wanton use of timber and soil⁸”.

Construction Continued: Rewards and Repercussions of the Reservoir

A Modern Miracle: The Salamonie Reservoir

The initiation of Salamonie as an official state forest was just one stage of its history, however, and changes to the landscape were far from over. While much construction had surrounded the river, it was initially untouched for several years after the forest was established. Before World War II, plans to control flooding were well under development and included ideas such as building structures to impound rivers. The federal Rivers and Harbors Act and Public Law 85-500, enacted in 1959 would have a great impact on these plans. While the title may not sound like anything groundbreaking, the law authorized “the construction, repair, and preservation of certain public works on rivers and harbors for navigation, flood control, and for other purposes.”¹⁹ In essence, this meant that it was now acceptable for rivers to be impounded, dams to be built, and reservoirs to be created. With this law, the Salamonie Reservoir would soon be born.

Beginning in the early 1960s, flood control projects quickly became rampant all over the state of Indiana. By 1963, 22 structures within the Wabash and Ohio Valleys were under review

¹⁸ Indiana Department of Conservation. 40th Annual Report. 1957-1958.

¹⁹ Rivers and Harbors Act of 1958, Public Law 85-500, 85th Cong., (July 3, 1958).

or already being constructed.²⁰ Among these was a project entitled “The Upper Wabash Three Reservoir Flood Control Project.” The project, initiated by Governor Matthew E. Welsh, consisted of the construction of three different reservoirs: the Salamonie, the Mississinewa, and the Huntington.²¹ The CCC would not be the ones aiding the Division of Forestry in planning and constructing this project however, as this program had ended with the initiation of World War II. Instead the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would be responsible for the construction and maintenance of these reservoirs. Created in 1802, federal agency designs, engineers, and constructs a variety of public works. However, they are most known for their work with flood control and dams, such as the Salamonie Dam. In total, the project would cost \$67,777,000 and would put 6,935 acres of water under management.²²

Inundation and Relocation

The master plan for the Salamonie Reservoir was completed in 1962.²³ In order to construct the reservoir, a large region of the land had to be flooded. With this being the case, the Army Corps of Engineers began to buy up several small townships which were soon to be submerged. Much of this started even before World War II began. This meant that entire communities had to be uprooted and moved to different areas and cemeteries had to be relocated to regions of higher ground as the area was scheduled to become inundated. This process was aided by workers from the Works Progress Administration (WPA). One of these affected towns was Monument City. From the 1870s until 1964, Monument City had grown into a small, bustling community. It was not a big city, only comprised of a school, a general store, a cemetery, and a Wesleyan church,

²⁰ Woodrow Fleming, “Newsogram,” *Outdoor Indiana*, November, 1963.

²¹ Thomas B. March, “Governor’s Tour of Conservation Properties,” *Outdoor Indiana*, April, 1964.

²² Indiana Department of Conservation, 45th Annual Report, 1962-1963.

²³ Indiana Department of Conservation, 44th Annual Report, 1961-1963.

but families in about 20 homes had built their lives around it (Fig. 4).²⁴ In the cemetery stood the city's namesake monument. The structure was simple in design; a tall, white pillar atop a square base and the summit was adorned with a grey, stone eagle with its wings outstretched (Fig. 5). Engraved on the base, however, were the names of many men from Polk Township who had died during the Civil War. In 1964, however, the entire city was torn down, flooded, and lying in a grave 14 feet beneath the surface of the Salamonie Reservoir. People were relocated, buildings were torn down, the cemetery along with the monument, and other various cemeteries were moved to a different area in Polk Township.

Preparing Recreational Waters

When preparing for the impoundment, the number and species of fish had to be determined as the reservoirs were planned to be used as recreational areas in addition to flood control. By the end of the assessment, it was found that rough fish such as carp were far more prevalent than game fish such as walleye, bluegill, and crappie. This ratio is detrimental to both recreational fishing and the environment because rough fish consume much of the prey that other fish depend on and have no predators. Additionally, because they are bottom feeders, they also stir up nutrients into the water, making the environment highly favorable for the development of detrimental algae blooms. Thus, the fish and game management decided that removal of the rough fish was necessary for the project to be completed successfully. It was decided that a fish sufficant would be spread through the water. Because the chemicals are not selective, both rough fish and game fish were killed during the process. However, only one game fish was killed for

²⁴ Debra Black, "Monument City Rises from Drought-Hit Salamonie Lake Bed," *The Star*, July 27, 2012, accessed March 10, 2015, http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2012/07/27/monument_city_rises_from_droughthit_salamonie_lake_bed.html

hundreds of rough fish, which is considered very successful.²⁵ Once the removal process was completed, the reservoir construction could proceed.

The Reservoir Completed and Stocked for Success

Official construction had begun in 1964 and in 1966 the Salamonie Reservoir was not only finally completed, but a complete success in regards to water management and flood control. The final structure crossed the width of the Salamonie River, stood 137 feet tall and had incorporated 16-ton flood gates²⁶ (Fig. 6). With the erection of the dam also came the establishment of the 2,860 acre Salamonie Lake.

With the Salamonie River and the creation of both Hominy Lake and Salamonie Reservoir, it should come as no surprise that fishing became one of the principal attractions to the Salamonie Forest. When the reservoir was completed and all the rough fish had been removed, the first fish stocking in 1968 consisted of 49,000 largemouth bass and 25,000 bluegill which were to serve as the foundation of the game population.²⁷ In addition to these, redear and black crappies were introduced. Soon after the initial stocking, a second round of fish with a different variety of species was introduced. This stocking consisted of smallmouth bass, rock bass, channel catfish, and flathead catfish. After observing these populations in the new environment, the reservoir manager of Salamonie discovered that because the reservoir is extremely turbid and has such an unusually large annual water level fluctuation (from 2,860 acres to 976 acres and back), the redear and black crappies were unable to tolerate the environment and thus died off.¹⁸ The initial poor fishing quality was noted by anglers such as *Indianapolis Star* editor 'Bayou Bill.' "High water and a variety of other factors contributed to a

²⁵ Sherman R. Gee, "Salamonie Reservoir- Underway," *Outdoor Indiana*, November, 1966.

²⁶ "Salamonie Reservoir," *Outdoor Indiana*, October, 1966.

²⁷ William D. James, "Fishing Management at Salamonie," *Outdoor Indiana*, May, 1978.

grand opening that was something short of grand.”²⁸ In addition to the failure of the stocked fish, non-stocked populations began to grow vigorously, eventually becoming more than three-fourths of the entire population. This was not necessarily deleterious to the goal of the fishery project, however. White crappies, gizzard shad, black bullheads, and several sunfish, suckers, and minnows provided new prey populations that the reservoir management utilized. In 1970, a million walleye fry were introduced into the water followed by several addition stockings, allowing for a successful, established population. In 1972, an explosive white bass population joined the growing stock of fish in the reservoir. The last addition, consisting of rainbow trout, occurred in 1978. Fishing however, would not be allowed for a couple more years, ensuring that the newly stocked populations are capable of thriving in the new environment. Despite this, a simple observation of the lake would convince a patron that the fish management was a success. Ripples on the surface and shadows lurking beneath the water gave proof that the aquatic community would flourish without a problem.

The First Flood Controlled

The dam was completed, the lake was prosperous for fisherman due to the now thriving populations, but what made the Salamonie Reservoir a true success was its ability to actually function in its original purpose: flood control. “While Northeastern Indiana and Northwestern Ohio assessed the damage...a little group of people stood on the 137-foot-high Salamonie dam this morning and watched a modern miracle.”²⁹ On December 9, 1966, the Salamonie Dam was given its first test; a five-day long rain creating 5 inches of precipitation. The seemingly endless downpour caused water to rush down the Salamonie at 4,000 feet per second. The dam, however, held strong. Only a small, steady stream was flowing out of the other side; exactly the amount

²⁸ Scifres, “Bayou Bill”. “Little Majenica Gem of a Creek.” *The Indianapolis Star*. June 8, 1969.

²⁹ Al M. Cahill, “Dam on River ‘Marvelous; Saves Wabash,” *News Sentinel*, December 9, 1966.

that was supposed to. As a result, local citizens were able to relax as the flooding problems they had to endure in the past were over. C.J. Walter, a resident for the Army Corps of Engineers was there that day and vocalized what many of the citizens were probably thinking, "The saving to this and [other] communities...down the river is inestimable."³⁰

While the reservoir construction clearly brought many benefits to the community, it did not come without controversy and damage to communities. Because there were a multitude of dams being built, stopping the flow of rivers all over the state, question of going too far began to arise. Woodrow Fleming, the director of fish and game recognized this danger stating, "...how long will it be before the last trickle of sparkling water ceases to splash over a rock bed..."³¹ He was also concerned that one day, rivers that were once filled with native fish such as rock bass would be overrun with game fish in favor of recreation. He also questioned his own position, wondering if the Department of Conservation would be able to deny the further construction of dams or simply go along with the trend.

Additions to the Reservoir

While the bulk of the recreational facilities of Salamonie Reservoir was completed in the 1960s, there were later additions as well. One of these was Salamonie Trail. In 1979, this trail was constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Ultimately, the goal of Salamonie Trail was to highlight the great diversity of habitats that are found within Salamonie Forest. With this goal in mind, the Corps cleared out a 20-mile long path that wrapped around the entire reservoir, over ravines and rocky cliffs and through the forest. The trail, however, was not considered a permanent establishment at first. Instead, it was opened for a two-year trial run which tested the trail itself and use of it for damage to the environment. As no significant harm was caused, the

³⁰ Al M. Cahill, "Dam on River 'Marvelous; Saves Wabash," *News Sentinel*, December 9, 1966.

³¹ Woodrow Fleming, "Newsogram," *Outdoor Indiana*, November, 1963.

trail was officially deemed a permanent trail in 1981. Currently, it is used for hiking, horseback riding, and is even restricted solely to snowmobile use in the winter.

Indiana's Atlantis

Monument City would never be the home to a community again, but very recently, the town has made a reappearance. In 2012, central Indiana underwent an unusually long drought causing the reservoir's levels to drop far below its usual height. As the water receded, patrons of the forest began to notice unusual structures beginning to surface in the middle of the lake. Roads, foundations, and bricks were sighted on the emerging island right where Monument City stood 48 years ago (Fig. 7). Curious visitors made their way over to new land and began to scope out the once submerged city. Other visitors, such as Ron Lawrence and Rowena Lawrence-Richardson, went to the land to visit a place they once called home. "It brings back a lot of old memories. You still wish you could come down over the hill. You still feel like it's part of you."³² While many visitors were just curious about the historic site, others began to take advantage of it. The Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) noticed some visitors had begun searching the land for loose bricks or other artifacts that they could take home with them.³³ Out of concern for the history of the area and because it is still protected by the state, the DNR closed Monument Island from patron use. Instead, they are planning on contacting Lawrence, Lawrence-Richardson, and many other the other surviving former residents of Monument City who were scattered throughout Huntington County historical works, such as a display in the Nature Center at Salamonie, in order to tell the story of Monument City.²¹ For

³² D. Salvador, S. Sarvay, and R. Martin, "Salamonie Reservoir's Sunken Town Invaded by Treasure Hunters," *21 Alive*, July 27, 2012, accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.21alive.com/news/local/163225086.html>.

³³ Indiana Outdoor News, "Town Submerged at Salamonie is Closed to Public," *Natural Geographic*, July 24, 2012, accessed March 11, 2015.

now, the city remains can be viewed with binoculars from the Lost Bridge East State Recreation Area boat ramp, found on the south side of the reservoir.

Associations with Salamonie: The State Recreation Areas

Although not part of the Salamonie River State Forest itself, there are four important areas associated with the forest that were constructed after the establishment of the forest. These are state recreation areas, or SRAs. These SRAs differ from state forests in that they are operated by the Division of State Parks and Reservoirs rather than the Division of Forestry. Additionally, some may require a service charge at the gate. The four SRAs connected to Salamonie are Lost Bridge, Mt. Hope, Mt. Etna, and Dora-New Holland. Because these all were established after long after CCC's work had ended, it was the U.S. Army Corps of engineers who built and established the facilities and amenities that were included in the SRAs. Of the four SRAs, Dora-New Holland and Lost Bridge each have stories that add to the rich history of Salamonie River State Forest.

Burning Bridges

Dora-New Holland joins Lost Bridge, Mt. Hope, and Mt. Etna as the four state recreation areas associated with the Salamonie River State Forest. It differs little from the other three in terms of recreational amenities, offering a boat ramp, a shelterhouse, and several trails. Overall, the peaceful area blends right in to the rest of what the forest has to offer, at least, on the outside. Despite this, Dora-New Holland is rich in its history. A guest visiting the area now, however, could not see that, as what made its claim to fame has since disappeared from the forest forever. This was the Dora Covered Bridge.

A small, bustling town named Dora had created a petition, “praying for a bridge to be built across the Salamonie River to the town of Dora.”³⁴ The petition, led by Isaac Sharp, was presented on March 6, 1860 to a Wabash County commissioner meeting. While the petition was heard, nothing was done about it until June 6th of that year. During that meeting, William A. VanBuskirk was appointed to perform surveys of the land and estimate the cost of building a bridge for the Town of Dora. Requiring that the bridge was to be built using stone abutments and piers, VanBuskirk was to report his findings at the Wabash commissioner meeting that September. VanBuskirk did not fail in his tasks, returning with many specific details about what the construction of the bridge would entail. The bridge would require 200 feet of superstructure, 280 cubic yards of masonry for the pier and abutments. With the superstructure costing \$17 per foot and the stone masonry costing \$4.50 per yard, the entire cost of the bridge was estimated to be \$4,607.50. The commissioners were not prepared to hear such an expensive price for a bridge, but were able to offer at least some money towards it. \$2,500 came out of the County Treasury, but the rest would be up to the citizens to obtain and offer up to the superintendent of the time.

Having succeeded in raising the money it was determined that the bridge should be completed before December 1, 1861. Designs for the bridge determined that it would be a “Howe Plan” structure.²⁷ A Howe bridge uses iron rods and buckles that gives more vertical support to the structure than timber wood. Thus, as the bridge adjusts and settles as time goes on, the rods can be adjusted with it. This design was extremely common during this time period.

With a design and a tentative completion date put in place, a second survey and estimation was to be completed before construction could begin on the new bridge. Thus, in March of 1861, Michael Minnick was appointed by the Wabash County commissioners as superintendent and would be in charge of the contract and construction of the bridge. On June 4th

³⁴ Neil A. Case, “Bridging the Centuries,” *Outdoor Indiana*, November, 1993.

of that year, Minnick reported back with an official estimation of the bridge after the contract had been drawn up. No records hold any other name than Minnick, and so it is assumed that he also played the role as the contractor. The superstructure would cost \$15.26 per foot equaling \$2,350 while the stone masonry would cost \$2.80 per yard equaling \$644. Thus, the total cost of the bridge would be around \$2,994, which was not far off from the total VanBuskirk had estimated. Even though the Dora Bridge was supposed to be completed December 1, 1861, like most construction projects, there were interruptions and setbacks. Thus, the bridge was not actually finished until June 9, 1862 when Minnick reported his success to the Wabash County commissioners, among whom was Mark Stratton, father of Gene Stratton-Porter.

The Dora Covered Bridge was opened in 1862 and remained in use until 1965. At this point, the bridge and the Town of Dora seemed as if they were going to meet the same fate as many of the structures of the surrounding areas. The Salamonie Dam and subsequent reservoir was set to be constructed just a mile down river from the historic bridge and connecting town. Because the town was within the affected area of the reservoir, they were both planned to be destroyed like Monument City, Lost Bridge, and several other areas. The citizens of Dora, however, would not stand for the destruction of the beloved bridge even if they lost their town and, as a result, formed the Dora-New Holland Village Society. This new group had planned to do whatever they could to save the bridge from being burned. The members began to raise funds from a variety of sources. Citizens donated \$1-\$25, organizations gave \$25, wealthy individuals gave about \$100 with two even giving \$500.³⁵ There were even children who helped the cause, donating around 25 cents apiece. Finally they had raised about \$10,000, enough to relocate the Dora Covered Bridge.

³⁵ "Dora Bridge," *Outdoor Indiana*, November 1967.

Once enough money was collected, a plan was implemented to save the bridge. Even if was never to be used like it once was again, the citizens wanted it to still **remain in existence** for memories and nostalgia. Thus, they attached 2 large, silver, metal oil tanks **as pontoons to** the bridge where they hung below. In December, 1966, when heavy rains threatened flooding, the Wabash River water levels began to drastically rise to about 21 feet. The pontoons and the bridge rose right with the water. This is when Howard Dillabaugh, his family, and other workers from Dora went into action. Hooking cables to the bridge, they pulled the bridge on its pontoons quickly to the shore where they finally were able to beach it about a mile away from its original site. The site where the Dora Covered Bridge landed on shore is the site that was to become the Dora-New Holland State Recreation Area and part of the Salamonie Reservoir. At that moment in time, however, the Dora-New Holland Historical Society imagined that it would be the beginning of a historical village that they wished to construct. Despite the fact that this never actually occurred, it became a popular location for citizens to visit for recreation and picnicking. In 1975, some fisherman had started to break floorboards in the bridge, however, in order to fish through them. These were fixed a year later when the bridge was rededicated by the citizens of Wabash. The society still managed to save a piece of history so that it could be enjoyed by others.

Like most good things however, the Dora Covered Bridge could not last forever, and it eventually succumbed to its original fate of being set on fire. On July 12, 1984, a local fisherman had noticed flames coming from the area near the bridge late at night and went to look closer. Upon examination, the Dora Covered Bridge was found engulfed in fire. While efforts were made to extinguish the fire, firemen who had arrived at 2:30 AM, were too late. The bridge had been overtaken without any hope of rescue. The area was analyzed for potential natural causes,

but none could be found. There was no lightning, no electric wires, and no evidence that this was an accident. It was determined that the bridge, then 122 years old, was lit on fire by means of arson. All of the hard work and efforts it took to build and save the bridge vanished in the flames. An onlooker of the scene managed to sum up the feelings of all the citizens in one sentence, “They burned a lot of memories last night.”³⁶

The Lost Bridge

Today, the Lost Bridge State Recreation Area is the most developed region associated with the Salamonie River State Forest. Patrons make their way towards this part of the forest for its many recreational amenities. What guests may not be aware of, however, is the story behind the mysterious name. Even though the area is entitled Lost Bridge, there is no bridge in sight, only State Road 105 dividing the recreation area in half. It turns out that the name is not as cryptic as it sounds. Lost Bridge, after spending several years being lost in a sea of controversy, eventually truly became physically lost from the world. Even though the bridge is now gone, the name left behind conjures up many memories and stories from local people of the area.

In 1913, a local farmer living just north of the Salamonie River led a group of local landowners in the creation of a petition that would eventually cascade into the controversy-plagued story of Lost Bridge. This man was George W. Young. At this point in time, the only way to get to the other side of the Salamonie was by going east, through Monument City. While the route eventually made its way over the river, it was time consuming and inconvenient for travelers. Thus, Young and the other landowners began to circulate a petition that called for a new road west of Monument City that could cross the Salamonie, thus providing a more direct route for the city’s inhabitants. After receiving and reviewing Young’s petition, the Huntington County commissioners approved the project. After the approval, the commissioners raised

³⁶ Neil A. Case, “Bridging the Centuries,” *Outdoor Indiana*, November, 1993.

\$7,784 to be used in the construction of both a new road and bridge crossing the Salamonie. Young's efforts would not be forgotten as it was decided to name the new route "George Young Highway."³⁷

A year after the initiation of the petition, two separate contracts were drawn up for the construction: one for the road and one for the bridge. The Rochester Bridge Company was hired first to construct the bridge in Polk Township just a few miles west of Monument City. The road was going to be constructed at a later date after the completion of the bridge. By the time construction was completed however, the bridge had racked up \$11,988 in cost. This was about \$4,000 more than what was initially raised and as a result, there was no funding left for the other contract. Thus, the George Young Highway could not be constructed. The anticipated road had become lost to traffic according to the locals who had christened the one hundred foot long, iron girder bridge with the name "Lost Bridge."³⁶

This was not the end of the story, however. Another year passed and, in 1916, Huntington County commissioners issued a second bond allowing for \$7,400 more to be raised and used for the construction of the George Young Highway. This time, contractor Jackson & Gordon was hired for the construction. After surveying the land, however, the project began to look more and more difficult. North of Lost Bridge, the land was too low to construct a road as it was because flooding would be too much of a problem. To correct this, the land needed to be raised 1,500 feet using fill dirt. On the other hand, land south of Lost Bridge was too high for a road to be constructed because it was too steep and dangerous for travel. In order to fix this, workers had to cut 800 feet horizontally and 36 feet vertically into the land. While it seemed possible to make these changes, it would not be without a great amount of effort. The construction equipment at the time did not do much to aid in making the project any easier. Slip scoops, shovels, wagons,

³⁷ Neil A. Case, "Lost Bridge." *Outdoor Indiana*, March, 1992.

and horse drawn equipment were heavily relied on, but not very efficient. Time began to march faster, costs kept rising, and obstacles never seemed to end. Soon after work on the southern land portion began, workers found that the soil type, which was of a hard clay, was nearly impossible to cut. Before long, World War I came upon the country driving the costs of labor even higher. As a result, the project became too expensive and difficult. It was abandoned once again. Unhappy with the decision of Jackson & Gordon, Huntington County sued the company and won the case, regaining the money lost to the project. Despite the success of the court case, Lost Bridge once again stood lost and alone with no road, no traffic, and no use.

Huntington County did not give up on the George Young Highway, however. With the conclusion of World War I, the commissioners tried for a third time to construct the highway and finally give Lost Bridge purpose. This time around, Samuel Palmer, a local contractor, was hired to complete the construction. He too failed, however. Palmer instead went on to be the new county commissioner and now had to deal with his own failure of constructing the road. While all of Palmer's on-again, off-again construction was occurring, locals began to embrace the area surrounding and including the Lost Bridge. Cabins and homes began cropping up in the vicinity of the bridge and the Salamonie River. They even hung a sign on the bridge, unofficially identifying it as "Lost Bridge."³⁸ The other commissioners voided Palmer's construction contract in 1928, declaring it a failure, and asked that he return the engineering drawing for the highway that looked like it may never be completed. Palmer however, refused to return the drawings, stating he was not in possession of them anymore. In fact, he claimed that mice had somehow gotten into his tool box where the drawings were and ate them. Palmer's refusal led to an avalanche of lawsuits that attempted to retrieve the \$12,000 that had been given to Palmer for the construction of the road. After various lawsuits Huntington County managed to regain most of

³⁸ Neil A. Case, "Lost Bridge." *Outdoor Indiana*, March, 1992.

the money. Despite all of this, Huntington County and the commissioners were, yet again, sent back to square one: a bridge that no one was able to cross.

The commissioners, determined to finish this never-ending, doomed project, chose a different route and placed the county engineer in charge of the road construction. Forced to redraw the engineering drawings, he had to visit the site to survey the surrounding land and bridge. After these surveys were complete, it was discovered that the Lost Bridge was not built to code. Due to the difference in bank heights, the bridge was sloped with the southern portion raised two-and-a-half feet higher than the northern portion. Once this was corrected, the final building costs of the road were determined to be \$12,613. A third bond was proposed, but was not successful in gaining the public's backing. Citizens of Polk had lost faith in the project and could no longer see the point in donating yet more money to it. At the same time this occurred, Palmer resurfaced having somehow found the plans, stating that the mice must not have gotten to them. Despite supposedly finding the plans, Palmer still refused to give them back and the county began threatening him with arrest. However, the threats went nowhere as the desire to build the road had fizzled.

In 1932, the project was commandeered by the State of Indiana. The road that took over twenty years to even start constructing was finished in less than one. George Young's legacy, however, was just as lost as the original bridge as the new road and subsequent bridge was renamed State Road 105. At long last, however the route was finally opened and ready for traffic, but the ultimate fate of Lost Bridge remained. With flooding becoming an increasingly serious problem, the Upper Wabash Reservoir project was put into effect. The proposed Salamonie Reservoir would bring the water of the Salamonie to a height that would ultimately submerge Lost Bridge. In order to prevent this, the entire structure was destroyed and replaced

by a larger, taller, concrete bridge. The bridge was so much taller that the top of what was Lost Bridge would have just touched the bottom of the new concrete one. This height allows State Road 105 to still be utilized, even under peak flooding conditions. While the construction of the new bridge was beneficial and necessary, its construction finally put Lost Bridge to rest, where it would truly be lost forever.

Conclusions

It appears that state forests are often overlooked or thought of as extensions of the state park system. In reality, however, the two are very different entities. While both are under control of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the state parks fall under the Division of State Parks and Reservoirs while the state forests are under the Division of Forestry. It is important to separate the two and understand that both offer different, but highly beneficial resources to the people. State parks focus more on the preservation of a location and thus center more on aesthetics, historic interest, and recreation. The state forests, however, provide many services to the communities that surround them. Although their primary purpose is to provide resources such as timber to the public, they also double as recreational sites.

Salamonie River State Forest is only one of Indiana's several state forests and functions the same as the others, but it is rich in its own history. The forest began with the people's will to change infertile soil into something that could be both used and enjoyed by citizens, thus correcting past management mistakes. It, like a few other forests, was meant to be a demonstration of change. This transformation took years and extensive efforts from the CCC and the Army Corps. of Engineers, but the result was something that could be enjoyed by generations. With the maturation of an 805-acre forest, a few manmade lakes, a major reservoir, and countless recreational activities in place, Salamonie State Forest is a prime example of man

and nature working in harmony. Additionally, Salamonie is the only state forest found in the northern portion of Indiana. Because of this, it provides a unique experience to those in that portion of the state. By knowing more about the background and history of the forest, patrons are able to connect on a deeper level with the area. It allows them to understand that this is not just a stand of trees with trails and water. Salamonie is a forest and a timber provider, a home to both wildlife and hunter, a water source for fish and fisherman, and a place for peace or recreation. The only way to truly understand Salamonie River State Forest and its history however, it to just go and see it.

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Figures



Fig. 1. Salamonie River. "Down by the River." Photograph. *Outdoor Indiana*, July, 1985.

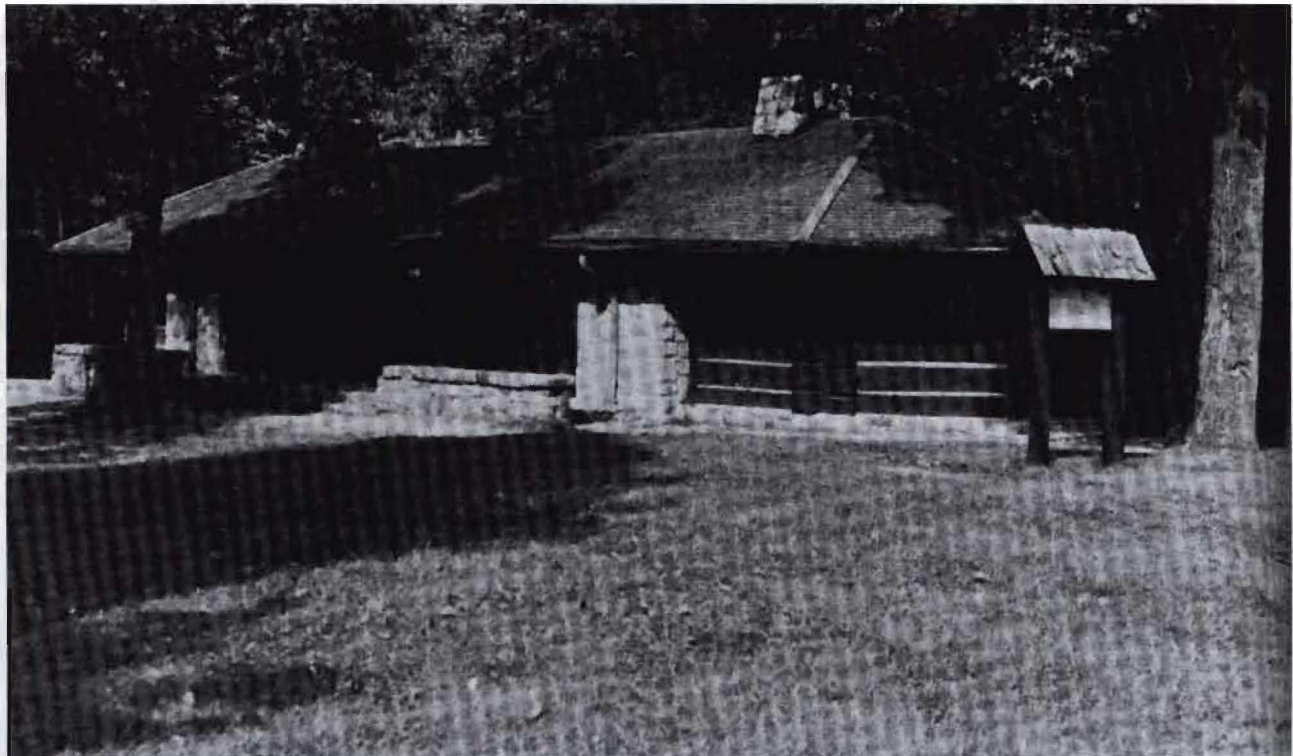


Fig. 2. Hominy Ridge Shelterhouse. "Indiana State Forests: A 60th Anniversary." Photograph.

Outdoor Indiana, January 1964.



Fig. 3. Recreational area outside of Hominy Ridge Shelterhouse. "Salamonie Forest Scenes."
Photograph. *Outdoor Indiana*, October 1959.



Fig. 4. Monument City prior to inundation. "Monument City Rises from Drought-Hit Salamonie Lake Bed," *The Toronto Star*, July 27, 2012, accessed March 10, 2015, http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2012/07/27/monument_city_rises_from_Droughthit_salamonie_lake_bed.html.



Fig. 5. John Gorentz. Monument City namesake monument. "Monument City Rises from the Salamonie River." Photograph. *The Spokesrider*, July 30, 2012. Accessed March 9, 2015. <http://www.spokesrider.com/2012/07/30/monument-city/>.



Fig. 6. Completed Salamonie Dam. "Salamonie Reservoir." *Outdoor Indiana*, October, 1966.

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Fig. 7. Matt Detrich. "Monument City School Foundation." Photograph. *Indianapolis Star*, July 25, 2012. Accessed March 9, 2015. <http://www.indystar.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?Avis=BG&Dato=20120725&Kategori=NEWS&Lopenr=207250810&Ref=PH>.



Fig. 8. Reconstruction of Hominy Ridge Shelterhouse in 2004. "Hominy Ridge." Photograph. *Metropolitan School District of Wabash County*, March, 2004. Accessed March 9, 2015. <http://www.msdlwc.k12.in.us/gt/projects/cc/shelter.html>